OPEN Doors

A publication of the Residential Tenancies Branch

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Every Little Bit Helps

It's in the best interests of all Manitobans to conserve energy and every little saving helps a lot. Landlords and tenants can make a big difference in our province's energy consumption just by following some of these tips:

- Use a bedside lamp instead of a ceiling light and use ENERGY STAR approved lamps and bulbs to save up to 70 per cent on electricity use for lighting.
- Use energy-saving bulbs for lights used more than three hours a day.
- Keep waterbed covers pulled up all day to save 30 per cent on heating the bed.
- Unplug cell phone and PDA chargers and video game consoles when not in use. Forty per cent of the energy consumed by household electronics occurs when they are on standby mode.
- Turn off computers and accessories (monitor, printer, speakers) when not in use.
- If rooms have individual thermostats, turn the heat down in those that aren't used much.
- Seal air gaps in walls, baseboards and around pipes to save up to 50 per cent on heating leaks.
- Close north facing window blinds during the day in the winter to conserve heat.
- Plug electronics into a power bar and switch it off when not in use.
- Preheat your oven only when baking. Use a toaster oven, frying pan or microwave to cook small meals.
- Use electric kettles instead of stove-top types.
- Defrost food in the refrigerator, not in the microwave or countertop, for better energy efficiency and food safety.
- Let cooked food cool off before storing in the refrigerator.
- Match pot size to stove element size to avoid wasting energy.
- Run a full load when using a dishwasher or clothes washer.
- Use the energy saver cycle on your dishwasher, or open the door after the final rinse to let the dishes air-dry.
- Buy only ENERGY STAR qualified products when buying home entertainment equipment.

For more information on energy conservation, visit the Seeing Green website at **manitoba.ca/seeinggreen**

To subscribe to Open Doors, give us your comments, or get more information, call 945-2476 in Winnipeg, toll free 1-800-782-8403 or visit **manitoba.ca/rtb**

Sharing Accommodations

If you're thinking of getting a roommate to share your living costs, here are some things you should consider:

Communication is key to any happy relationship and it's no different between roommates. Before you move in together, set some guidelines to avoid any problems that might spring up. Talk about household responsibilities, use of personal property, key sharing and individual privacy. Decide who will pay the rent, utility bills and any other shared expenses.

There are practical aspects to living together and there are also personal ones. Know, in advance, what the other person(s) think about issues such as overnight guests, smoking, food sharing, drug and alcohol use. It's better to agree on key issues beforehand to avoid problems later.

Remember – the person who signs the lease, or verbally agrees to the landlord's terms, is legally responsible for the behaviour of the other roommates. If two or more tenants sign the same lease, each is legally responsible for the rent and any damage that happens during the tenancy. If a landlord makes a claim for compensation after a tenancy ends, the landlord can choose to file the claim against all or any one of the tenants.

Single Unit Rehabilitation

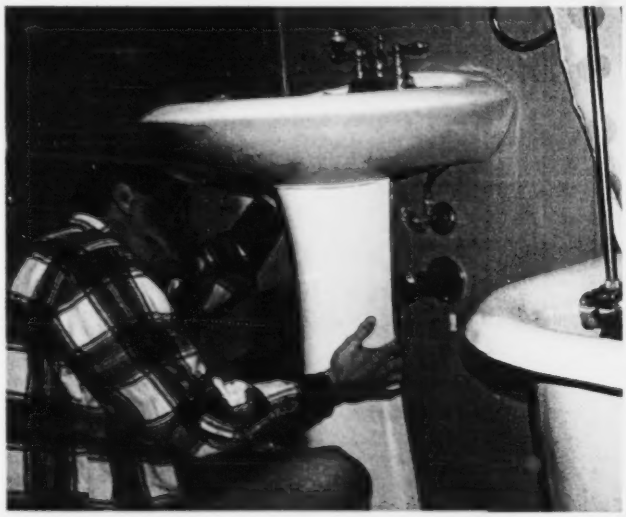
Landlords can apply for the approval of a rehabilitation scheme for a single unit. This program applies to units that have been voluntarily vacated in residential complexes that have four or more units.

To apply for approval of a rehabilitation scheme for a unit that has been, or will become, voluntarily vacated, a landlord must complete an Application for Approval of Rehabilitation Scheme for Specified Unit. The form must be submitted to the Branch before 20% of the total renovation is complete along with the processing fee of $100.00.

A landlord may apply for up to 10% of the total units in a residential complex. The Branch will exempt up to 3,000 rental units from rent regulation each calendar year. The total number of units exempt under this program cannot exceed 5,500 at any time.

When reviewing an application, the Branch will consider the general condition of the complex as well as that of the unit. To qualify for approval, the rehabilitation must make major improvements that substantially increase the quality of the rental unit. It must include the replacement of at least three of the following:

- kitchen cabinets or kitchen countertops and sink;
- appliances;
- bathroom fixtures;



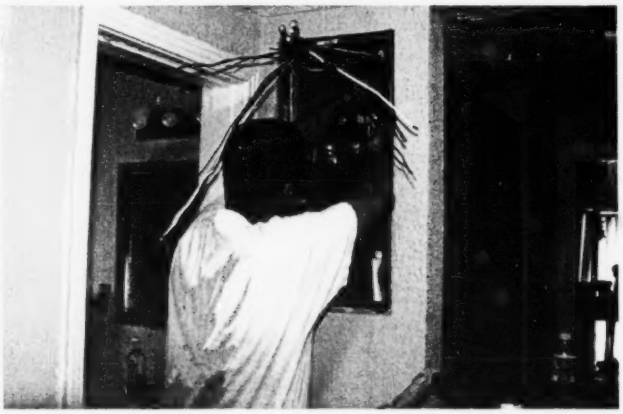
Single Unit Rehabilitation *(continued)*

- flooring;
- electrical wiring;
- interior doors;
- windows or patio doors;
- any other improvement the Branch accepts.

If an application is approved, the unit can be exempted from rent regulation for up to 2 years. The length of time the unit may be exempt is determined as follows:

Rehabilitation Cost of Unit (not including the application fee)	Exemption Period
$3,500.00 - $4,999.99	1 year
$5,000.00 or more	2 years

The application form is available from any Branch office or on the Branch's website **manitoba.ca/rtb.**



Resolving Landlord-Tenant Disputes

The Residential Tenancies Branch (RTB) has already helped informally resolve thousands of client disputes, thanks to its user-friendly client services unit.

Often, client services staff can resolve a dispute over the phone so that both landlord and tenant are satisfied. The client services system helps clients who come to the Branch with a problem to find a solution. If both parties agree on a solution, a client services officer (CSO) can prepare a mediated agreement outlining what is required from both of them. If no immediate agreement is reached, the clients have other options. They can decide to go to a hearing or the Branch may investigate further.

"Our CSOs take every reasonable step to help landlords and tenants resolve their differences quickly," says Laura Gowerluk, director of the Residential Tenancies Branch. She notes that client services officers have informally resolved over 15,000 disputes since the new system was launched in 2005.

The ideal situation is to avoid the dispute in the first place, but almost everyone disagrees some time. Most problems result from people not realizing they have broken the tenancy agreement or not knowing their legal rights and responsibilities. Take time to know your rights and understand your tenancy agreement to help promote a good relationship with your landlord or tenant.

When there is a dispute, consider meeting with the other person to try to resolve it. When landlords and tenants meet to talk through their disagreements, both should:

- know their legal rights
- understand the problem
- consider possible solutions
- be respectful
- stay cool
- document everything
- know when to take a different approach

If communication has broken down and it appears the dispute cannot be resolved, dispute resolution services might be the answer. Either the landlord or tenant can contact the Residential Tenancies Branch. Letting the other person know you intend to apply for the service can sometimes inspire renewed interest in reaching an agreement.

For more information on dispute resolution, contact any Branch office.

SERVICE CHANGES AND YOU

Service changes are sometimes necessary and landlords must let tenants know what's happening in advance.

Before landlords reduce or withdraw services, such as building security or reduced pool hours, tenants must receive three-months' written notice.

"Landlords sometimes have to make changes because safety standards and bylaws change," says Laura Gowerluk, director of the Residential Tenancies Branch. "When tenants are affected by those changes, they must receive prior written notice and any appropriate adjustments to their rent."

"Landlords sometimes have to make changes because safety standards and bylaws change,"

To reduce or withdraw a service, landlords must give the affected tenants the required notice and apply to the Branch for a valuation of the reduced or withdrawn service. When the Branch receives an application, tenants will have the opportunity to review the information the landlord submits and make written comments about the change.

To make a decision about the value of a reduced or withdrawn service, the Branch considers the landlord's actual or estimated cost for providing the service as well as any submissions received from tenants. The Branch's order will indicate how much the affected tenants' rent will be reduced and when that reduction will take effect.

For more information about the requirements for service changes, see the Branch's Policies and Procedures Guidebook at **manitoba.ca/rtb.**

Need information?

ONLINE
manitoba.ca/rtb

OFFLINE
in person or by phone

Visit your branch office Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Winnipeg at 302–254 Edmonton Street
or call **945-2476**

Brandon at 157–340 9th Street
or call **726-6230**

Thompson at 113–59 Elizabeth Drive
or call **677-6496**

Toll free 1-800-782-8403

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